

WINTERVILLE JUNE 12, 2015
RIVERTONS Enterprise



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Band members Calin Peters, Martin Earley and Devin Mauch

Thieves circle back, road-weary but wiser

By Patricia Robert

"We like to say we are a rock band in a folksy suit, leaning more toward the rock 'n' roll sensibility," said guitarist Martin Earley, one of the three members of The Ballroom Thieves. "But there is a lot of storytelling in our songwriting. There is a lot going on in our lyrics."

The Ballroom Thieves will be performing tomorrow night (Jan. 21) at Purpl in Hastings, where they last appeared two years ago.

Earley's bandmates are Calin Peters on cello and electric bass and drummer

Devin Mauch. All three perform vocals, with Earley as lead. The trio, which started out in Boston, has been together for three and a half years; their debut album, "A Wolf in the Doorway," was released in 2015 and their second, "Deadeye," which they will highlight at Purpl, was released this past October.

"While 'Wolf' dealt primarily with your classic tales of relationships gone awry, 'Deadeye' really deals with our life on the road, and everything that started to happen then," Mauch told the Enterprise. The three were enjoying a few days

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off in the Red Hook area of the Hudson Valley, where Mauch's parents live.

The "everything that started to happen" refers to life on the road for The Ballroom Thieves as they toured for almost 11 months nonstop, through 2015. It meant giving up apartments, storing furniture, leaving roommates and friends, and heading out to all parts of the U.S. and Canada, as far west as Oregon and Washington and as far south as Georgia, with multiple stops in between.

"Living out of a suitcase can be challenging," said Earley, 29.

"Yeah," Mauch, 28, echoed. "It was exciting at the time, having such an extreme touring schedule. We were living the dream. But a lack of roots takes its toll."

In response to the tensions, loneliness, and fatigue, the group found energy in their performances, and in the positive vibes at increasingly sold-out venues. They also found an outlet, putting their feelings into the new material that became "Deadeye."

As Earley explains in the song "Trouble": "Carried by the current of the morning/miles below the service of the dawn/this is not the place that I was born in/but that doesn't mean it's not the place where I belong."

Peters, 28, whose fans have dubbed her "Callie," had the added strain of being the only female in the mix.

"It was great most of the time," she said. "But I had the same woes as the guys, plus I was always aware that I work in what is still a man's world. It would be so much fun for me when we were appearing with groups that included women."

She also noted a related factor that set her apart from Mauch and Earley: her backpack, stuffed with shoes, "usually at least five pairs, which I have a weakness for." Onstage, she noted, "I can wear pret-



PHOTO BY LUKE GOTTLIEB

Peters, Mauch and Earley

ty much what I want, as long as it doesn't malfunction. Still, I know I'm a role model, so I try to be tasteful. And I love the '70s look."

While Peters experienced the same upheavals as her bandmates, she said, "We all think we know who we are, then we start a new chapter, and the world is turned upside-down, and you relearn yourself. It's a beautiful thing. The most difficult experiences can be the most fruitful."

The lyrics in her song, "Canary," were meant to capture these feelings, as it begins with the wistful line: "I thought I

booking, and start taking care of ourselves. We all had this dream of being famous. But now we want to define what we need to be sustainable, with the ultimate goal of still working, but having families and all that."

The group will now tour seven or eight months a year, broken up into smaller segments. For every three weeks on tour they will take five or six days off.

While the three are from different areas of the Northeast — Earley from Maine, Mauch from New York, Peters from Massachusetts — their paths led to Boston and the Lizard Lounge, a small basement club off of Harvard Square in Cambridge. Earley and Mauch graduated from Stonehill College, south of Boston, where they first met and began to experiment with playing music together. Peters graduated from the Berklee College of Music with a bachelor's degree in Professional Music, and is considered the most serious and most versatile musician of the group. The guys were more recreational instrumentalists. Earley picked up a guitar in high school, while Mauch, who had studied the guitar a bit while growing up, turned to drums when he joined The Ballroom Thieves. The three were introduced at the Lizard Lounge; at the performance where Peters was concluding her relationship with another group. The Ballroom Thieves was born that night.

The three said they were looking forward to performing at Purpl again. "The people there were so kind to us when we played there previously and I like what they have done with the space, and the sound is good, too," Earley said.

In summing up the past year with all its trials, Peters concluded, "We were like teenagers becoming older, but we put in the work, we have crossed over, we've calmed down and are smiling again."

The Ballroom Thieves perform tomorrow (Jan. 21), at 8 p.m., at Purpl, 52 Main St., Hastings. Tickets are \$22. For further information, call (914) 231-9077 or visit purpl.org.